CHICAGO SUN-TIMES MAGAZINE

Ifs and buts—no conclusions

By Tom Littlewood

THE LIMITS OF POWER: America's Role in the World. By Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 224 pages. $5.95.

Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy (D-Minn.) qualified for his pedestal in the gallery of liberal heroes on a warm July evening at Los Angeles in 1960. The Democratic convention had already been securely wrapped up for delivery to John F. Kennedy. But Gene McCarthy stirred the party and the country with his memorable nomination of the chronically uncertain Adlai E. Stevenson for President. "Power sometimes comes to those who seek it," he said that night, "but history does not prove that power is always well used by those who seek it."

EUGENE J. McCARTHY

In the intervening years, McCarthy's own career in the Senate has been vaguely unfulfilled and disappointing. His colleagues consider him inconsistent, unmotivated and even lazy, more given to philosophical reflections than the gritty work of legislating. His disengagement from partisan activities in his home state is a concern to the Democrat-Farmer-Labor Party.

Now the senator has undertaken to tell in this book how the foreign policy of the United States would have been shaped if the convention and the nation had heeded his plea, and if Adlai Stevenson were alive and in the White House today.

His theme—highly relevant in Vietnam and elsewhere around the globe—is that throughout history mighty nations have learned the limits of power or met disaster. He drives it home with these concluding words:

"Surely the most powerful nation in the world can be secure and confident in its own strength if it is convinced that the strength is being used for noble and worthy purposes. A nation has prestige according to its merits. America's contribution to world civilization must be more than a continuous-performance demonstration that we can police the planet."

This message is essentially an amplified replay of the many reports of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee under its Stevensonian thinker, Chairman J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.). Fulbright repeatedly has suggested that the United States is "succumbing to an arrogance of power."

Terribly vital questions of war and peace are threshed over within the walls of the Senate in the week-to-week clash of attitudes and jurisdictions between Fulbright's committee and what McCarthy characterizes as the Defense Establishment of the Armed Services Committee. The latter committee has Chairman Richard B. Russell of Georgia, John Stennis of Mississippi and Stuart Symington of Missouri to more than balance the Three Professors who are the pacesetters on Foreign Relations—Fulbright, McCarthy and Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana. Their competition of contradictory points of view bobs to the surface every once in a while on such issues as who is to keep an eye on the Central Intelligence Agency and is the arms supply program for foreign countries getting dangerously out of hand.

The professors are equipped to inject sorely needed historical perspective into their arguments. McCarthy

Tom Littlewood is a member of The Sun-Times Washington Bureau staff.

is especially alarmed by the changing motives behind the U.S. role as international supplier of $4 billion a year in arms. What started as fortification of the defense arc around the Communist empire has now expanded to diverse political uses. The Defense Department promotes the sale of weapons to keep our friends on top in "client states" around the world. Military advisers serve as on-the-spot salesmen. But where, he asks, are all our stanch friends in Southeast Asia?

American arms were used to keep military leaders in control in Latin America, and to encourage the arms build-up in the Mideast. Stating that nothing is to be gained by being coy about our commitment to Israel, McCarthy recalls, nonetheless, that the United States promised Skyhawk bombers, offensive weapons, to that country last year. In the meantime the Jordanians were given Starfighter jets that cost $2,000,000 apiece; Hawk missiles were introduced into Saudi Arabia; and a squadron of F-4 Phantom jets were sold to Iran. All this and much more, while the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency continues grinding out straight-faced reports and studies.

The author hesitates to fit the pieces neatly together. Like the teacher that he once was, he is careful not to jump to conclusions and prefers that his students think through for themselves the lessons to be drawn.

All the more pity, therefore, that McCarthy is far less than a Stevensonian wordsmith. His style is not very compelling ("it was during his term that a point was reached after which it has been nonsensical to say . . ."). *Limits of Power* will not keep you awake through the night.

The assumption that underlies this and other expositions of the Fulbright-McCarthy view is that the administration's policy is based largely on unsubstantiated assumptions. McCarthy says Red China is not today a threat to the United States. She talks a world power game, but her prime concern is internal and her foreign policy one of relative restraint and caution, aimed only at re-establishing her traditional sphere of influence.